

GENESIS—WEEK 3

GOD COMMANDS ADAM



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is The Creation by Michael van der Borch (~1300 – 1370)
On display at the Museum Meermanno in The Hague, Netherlands*

Having finished His creation, God rested on the seventh day. Then the narrative shifts to an “on the ground” point of view. Man and woman are created in God’s image and commanded to rule.

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Thank you.

Genesis 2:1–26 — God Commands Adam
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1 Genesis 2:1–3 (ESV)

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

There are two unique things about the seventh day: it doesn't have an evening and a morning, and it's declared holy instead of just good or very good.

Some commentators conclude from the lack of an evening and morning that the seventh day isn't over. This is a puzzle because many of the things God does now (like answer prayer) bear a striking resemblance to work. Getting crucified doesn't sound particularly restful either.

Conversely, Psalm 95:11, which is quoted twice in Hebrews, indicates that God's rest is ongoing.

Therefore I swore in my wrath, "They shall not enter my rest."

This hints that "my rest" means Heaven. That fits well with the seventh day being declared holy. Holy means more than good; it means separated unto God. Heaven is about as holy as it gets. It must be separated in some way.

It's widely understood that heaven (AKA eternity) is outside of time. Hmmm. This might just be the answer to the puzzle. We're not living in the seventh day because we're still inside of time. We're seeing everything from our temporal point of view.

Heaven is something else.

It's fun to think about what Heaven is like—as long as we don't take our imaginings too seriously. As always, a main goal of these exercises is to awe and humble us.

Many common views of Heaven and Hell are so unbiblical that they should be shot down immediately. Even the best descriptions of Heaven and Hell are inaccurate. No need to focus on the worst ones.

First on that list is the view that the devil and his minions run Hell. They will not be the torturers in hell; they'll be the torturees. The Bible does show them occasionally being allowed to do mischief in this world (e.g. in Job) but that's all. Their future is totally bleak.

So, for example, the view of Hell portrayed in "The Screwtape Letters" by CS Lewis isn't serious. It's one of the all-time great Christian classics because of its portrayal of people, not hell.

Similarly, there's no Biblical support for the idea that heaven is us lounging on clouds playing harps. And St. Peter quizzing folks at "The Pearly Gates" is great for jokes but not anything else.

One portrayal I absolutely recommend is in "The Great Divorce" by CS Lewis. Read it for the first time and you'll be stunned by how different and mind-stretching its portrayal of Heaven and Hell is.

It's quite humbling, which is kind-of the point.

2 Genesis 2:4 (ESV)

*These are the generations
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.*

After describing the days of creation, Moses starts over. What’s that all about?

The Hebrew idioms used here are challenging. The word translated as “generations” (תּוֹלְדוֹת, toe-le-dote) is from the root (לָדָה, ya-laad) which means “bear, bring forth, beget.”

<http://bibleapps.com/hebrew/3205.htm>

While “generations” is the literal translation of this word, that isn’t what it means here. The NIV translates this as “*This is the account of ...*,” the NKJV as, “*This is the history of ...*” So, toe-le-dote means something like “timeline.” This retelling fits well with the idea that God is outside of time.

Notice also that Moses says, “*in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,*” not, “*in the six days ...*” The Hebrew word for “day” (יוֹם, yohm) is another idiom. It need not mean a calendar day.

We have the same idiom in English. We don’t mean a 24 hour period when we say, “You’ll have your day in court.” The same can be said for, “*the great and awesome day of the LORD.*” — Malachi 4:5 (ESV)

So, this verse is announcing a change in perspective. Previously, we saw creation from God’s point of view as the creator. Now we’re going to see creation from the perspective of the creation.

Google Maps users might call this “street view.”

Most of the rest of the Bible is written in street view, but the heavenly view bits (e.g., Revelation, parts of Daniel and of Job) are especially interesting. Notably, these tend to be controversial passages. There’s a lesson in that.

We live in street view, and that’s how our brains are wired. Thus, the wide disagreement over the heavenly view passages should humble us. It seems that we aren’t capable of fully understanding them.

This leads to an important, if harsh, conclusion. Any biblical view that leans heavily on one particular interpretation of a heavenly view passage is on thin ice. All our interpretations are simple-minded, at best.

And there’s another great lesson imbedded in the difference between heavenly view and street view—it’s the essence of prophecy.

We tend to think that prophecy means seeing the future. But most prophecies don’t predict; they pronounce. A prophet sees into heaven and speaks from the heavenly view. This is beautifully explained in a video series by Richard Pratt titled “He Gave Us Prophets.”

<https://thirdmill.org/seminary/course.asp/vs/HGP>

3 Genesis 2:5–14 (ESV)

When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

God could have created man by snapping His fingers, or by speaking, or any other way He desired.

But He *formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature*. Why?

Note that there are two facts here. God chose to create man from the dust of the ground, and He chose to tell us about it. He wants us to know we are created from dust.

The point is that we're made of the same stuff that everything else is made of. Like so many things in the Bible, this is to humble us. God doesn't want the "created in God's image" thing to go to our heads. Our egos are big enough already.

Imagine how much worse they'd be without this check.

Pay close attention to the last sentence of the first paragraph in today's passage.

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

These two trees will play a major role later. Each one does what its name implies. The tree of life gives life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil gives knowledge of good and evil.

The thing to note now is that the text mentions these trees because they are important.

They are *not* there for no purpose.

One is for eating from, and one isn't. These roles will be critical.

4 Genesis 2:15–17 (ESV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Here we bump up against another odd instance of the use of the word “day.” In this case, if “yohm” meant “age” (or something like that) then it would add nothing to the passage. The sentence might as well have read, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for **if** you eat of it you shall surely die.*”

As we’ll see, Adam doesn’t die the “day” he eats the fruit. Something doesn’t make sense. However, since Moses wrote the whole book of Genesis—including the part where Adam lives a long time—this can’t be a mistake. There must be an explanation.

It turns out there are many.

First off, God doesn’t say, “*in the day that you eat of it you shall die.*” He says, “*in the day that you eat of it you shall **surely** die.*” After Adam and Eve eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God excludes them from the tree of life, which sentences them to surely die. They will not live forever.

So, the day they ate of the tree, they didn’t die, they surely died.

Another explanation is that the use of “day” here is the same Hebrew idiom that’s used in 1Kings 2:36-46. There, Solomon warns Shimei not to go out of his house.

For on the day you go out and cross the brook Kidron, you will know for certain that you shall surely die. Your blood shall be on your own head. — 1 Kings 2:37 (NASB)

“*On the day,*” is just a term of emphasis, as is, “*you shall surely die.*”

So, in each case the colloquialism “*on the day*” is a colloquialism to make the command as emphatic as possible.

And notice that in each case, the command is disobeyed.

There’s even a third explanation—my favorite. They were dead in the same 24 hour day that they ate the fruit—spiritually dead.

This fits perfectly with the doctrine of original sin. We must be “saved” to become alive.

Once Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they were just as dead as we are (or were). Having sinned, they were now “dead in sin.”

The truth doesn’t have to be one of these explanations. It could be all of them.

5 Genesis 2:18–26 (ESV)

Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

When Adam first sees Eve, he says, “At last!” That’s a Hebrew idiom for, “Now we’re talkin’!”

Just kidding. Adam is obviously pleased, but the lesson here is like some other recent lessons. God could have made Eve any way He wanted, but He made her this way—and told us about it—to make a point.

The point is, “*Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*” This jumps out because Adam doesn’t have a father and mother. The whole concept of childbirth and parenthood hasn’t even been introduced yet.

But God tells us that He made woman this way “*therefore*” marriage is a biological union.

This concept is part of the structure of our civilization.

A married couple is one person in the eyes of the law.

But the structure of our civilization is crumbling. People aren’t getting married. Even the word “married” has been watered down. It’s now little more than a box you check on your tax return.

We are slowly, relentlessly, being pulled away from a society of families into a society of individuals. The IRS may recognize families, but many parts of our society don’t.

This is, fundamentally, an attack on children. They are the most vulnerable, yet they will, in a generation, be running things. Ruin them and the downfall of the whole civilization is assured.

And sure enough, children are at the center of many battles. We see traditional parents—the ones who would lay down their lives for their kids—at war with people who want the parents to have less say in things.

And the number of people on the parents’ side is getting fewer every year.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. What is your image of Heaven? Of Hell?
2. Do you struggle with the prophecies in the Bible?
3. When you think about who we are and what we are, what humbles you most?
4. Why do people seem to disobey almost any command they're given, even if it's not difficult?
5. What's the best way to explain or illustrate the importance of marriage?